

**February 2024**

**Issue No.89**

Charity No.1101205

## Coffee Morning a Great Success!



Invitations to our Coffee Morning in East Leake village hall during January were extended to members and non members alike. And attendances far exceeded expectations. Swelled by the numbers of locals who came to

find out more about us, and no doubt attracted by the offer of free coffee and cake, around 100 individuals passed through the doors.



There were a number of displays from interest groups and other activities and our new visitors seemed to be interested in what we

have to offer. The supply of leaflets and application forms completely ran out. Let's hope we can look forward to seeing new members joining us in the near future.



And there's more to come. On Saturday morning 17th February, East Leake community is organising a 'Meet the Village' event where various organisations will be displaying. We'll be one of them, providing another opportunity for local people to discover our u3a.



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### From Our Chairman...

Firstly, I would like to extend a warm welcome to everyone who has joined Soar Valley in recent months. I hope you will find u3a has many interesting activities to enjoy!

So, another year is upon us and I am sure we are all looking forward to everything that Soar Valley u3a has in store for 2024. As well as regular group activities the social and outings team are working hard to organise lots of great events for us over the next 12 months.

How would **you** like to help shape the future of Soar Valley u3a? With the AGM just round the corner please consider nominating yourself as a future member of the committee. New people with new ideas help our organisation to thrive. Please contact Business Secretary Mike Sharpe if you are interested. His details are on the back page. All the best for the year ahead.

*Chris*



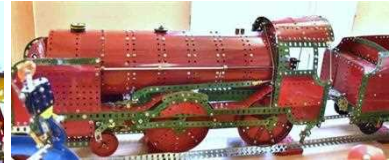
## MECCANO - A Way Of Life

Everybody has heard of Meccano. There can't be many men amongst us that weren't given a

Meccano set as a young child. But for some, that early fascination with countless little bits of brightly coloured metal - punched with holes, and with tiny nuts and bolts to painstakingly fix them together - has become a lifetime passion. Such is the case of **Wendy (above) and Rob Miller**, our speakers at the November general meeting. Some of us know member Wendy as our talented Singing Group pianist, but this talk opened up an entirely different side of her life, much less familiar to us.

And it really is a way of life, occupying the whole family, including her four children, and much of the house! For the past several decades, Wendy and Rob have motored the length of the country and travelled overseas to take part in Meccano events. They've won awards, met new friends and worked with schools and youth groups; encouraging the creative and engineering skills of young people.

There seems to be no end to what can be made from Meccano: locomotives, cars, Ferris wheels, bridges, helter skeltas - the list is endless, and many of them are working models. We saw a magnificent



display of what the couple have produced over the years and had some fun pressing buttons.

Even Alec Issigonis used Meccano to help design the Mini car back in the fifties. And James May's full size Meccano motorcycle (below) is on display at a museum in Beaulieu.

Meccano has been around for an amazing 120 years. But what of the future?

Manufacture in Europe is coming to a close and Wendy notes that fewer young children are attending her schools projects. It seems that more of them look for a quick fix these days and may not have the patience that Meccano demands. And of course, there are so many digital distractions.



Perhaps the growing incorporation of robotics into Meccano might rekindle interest, Wendy muses. Time will tell. But I wonder how many of you with young grandchildren bought them a Meccano set for Christmas.

**Brian Hinners**

## First Aid Workshop

It had been four years since SVU3a last organised a series of First Aid workshops, and some members felt ready for a refresher. Sixteen attended a new workshop delivered by the Red Cross last November.

Our trainer, Rupesh Chauhan, covered a variety of topics in the ninety minute session such as dealing at a basic level with falls, bleeding, sprains, broken bones and suspected strokes and heart attacks. Using dummies we practised cardio pulmonary resuscitation (*right*) and Rupesh demonstrated how to use a defibrillator (*left*).



Judging by the high level of interactivity, an appreciative audience left with a refreshed knowledge of what to do in an emergency. But there was a lot to remember. Fortunately Red Cross provides a free app which you can download here:

[Free first aid apps | Adult and baby | British Red Cross](#)



*Heart attack recovery position*

## Committee Changes

After seven years in the role of organising our coach outings, *Roger Golds* and *Jan Chapman* have now stepped down. We thank them both for doing such a marvellous job, much appreciated by the many members who have enjoyed so many great trips.

**Alison Lloyd** is now our Outings Organiser, and her previous role of Social Events management is handed over to **Ruth Grantham**, who has been assisting Alison. Ruth has joined us on the Committee.

Our thanks to them both for putting on some excellent socials, including the highly popular Christmas party and the recent coffee morning. Here's what's planned for this year, or is in the process of planning, so far.



*Ruth and Alison*

## Coach Outings



### Friday 10th May

Based at the Three Counties Showground in Malvern, Worcestershire. You can walk around the show gardens and the Floral Marquee and get hints and tips from a range of talks and demonstrations. Alan Titchmarsh will be there on this Friday too!

*Coach leaves 9am and returns around 6.30pm. Cost £48pp, including entry.*



### Anderton Boat Lift and Little Moreton Hall Wednesday 26th June



We arrive for coffee then board the Edwin Clark trip boat and enjoy the unique experience of being transported 50 feet between the Trent and Mersey canal and the River Weaver. After lunch we visit National Trust Little Moreton Hall.

*Coach leaves at 8am and returns about 5.45pm. Cost £35pp for NT members, £48 for non members.*



### York - Monday 16th September

The day is yours. See the York Minster? Walk the Roman walls? Visit the National Railway museum? Afternoon tea in the 14th century Shambles? Visit the York Castle Museum? Spoil yourself in York's Chocolate Story?

*Coach leaves at 8.30am and returns around 6.30pm. Cost £23pp*

**All coaches depart from, and return to, Sutton Bonington Playing Fields car park.  
To book places, please contact Alison Lloyd Tel: 01509 673782  
Email: [alison.lloyd1955@gmail.com](mailto:alison.lloyd1955@gmail.com)**

## Other Social Events

We're working on organising a **Summer Social Afternoon**, maybe another **Coffee Morning** later in the year, and East Leake golf club has been booked for a **Christmas Party** on Friday 29th November. Keep an eye out for further details.

### Older Drivers Workshop - 2pm Tuesday 30th April, Barton in Fabis village hall

Offered free by the East Midlands Road Safety team, this will be a light hearted and open one hour session to help you prolong and enhance your driving. Twenty members signed up at the General Meeting on 30th January but there are still some places left.

*If you're interested, please contact Chris Bowerman: Email: [chris.bowerman@btinternet.com](mailto:chris.bowerman@btinternet.com)  
Tel: 01159 830510*

## Christmas Party Time

East Leake Golf Club was the new venue for our Christmas party in December. A record ninety five of us tucked into an excellent carvery dinner followed by entertainment from the Workhouse Storytellers and some energetic folk dancing to work off those extra calories. Our thanks to organisers, Alison Lloyd and Ruth Grantham, for a great evening.



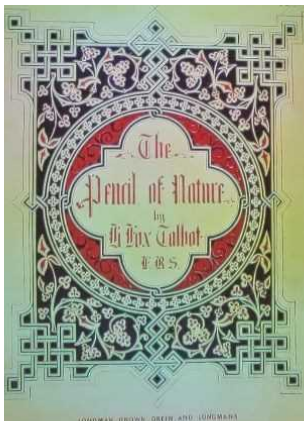
*Workhouse Storytellers*



## Vintage Photography

From the pioneers of photography to digital cameras and the mobile phone of today, technology has come a long way. Dr Nick Botrill from Loughborough University provided a combined meeting of the **Photographic and Science and Technology groups** a highly engaging and fascinating insight into some of the earliest photographic techniques in a talk on Vintage Photography.

As well as the science, Nick related a variety of interesting and amusing stories associated with his passion for the subject. On show at the meeting were various pieces of kit from his extensive private collection. This included some of the earliest plate cameras. Nick told us a lot about how they were used using the wet plate collodion technique. Collodion is a flammable, syrupy solution of nitrocellulose in ether and alcohol and is spread over a surface of a plate to make it sensitive to light – imagine preparing to take a selfie if you had to use that process!



The first ever photographic image was made in 1826. Images at that time were unique and it was not possible to reproduce them. It was not until 1841 that Fox Talbot developed the Calotype from which it was possible to make multiple copies. The first ever pictures in a book were published in 1844.

One of the interesting images Nick included in his presentation was that of Billy the Kid (right). A unique picture that apparently would have a value of \$5m if it came up for sale today.

Another intriguing fact answered the



question: why do old pictures of Victorian men and women look like they were going to a funeral? All in black and never smiling.

Old techniques require the subject to stay still for up to 10 mins – it is difficult to maintain a smile for that long! Old photographic plates also render many colours in black, hence the funeral appearance of the subjects.

Nature lovers will no doubt have heard of Eric Hoskin, a very famous photographer noted for his bird photography. Hoskin used a plate camera for much of his work and his actual camera, a valuable asset in Nick's collection. This camera was shown to us at the meeting as well as others, all hand made by the famous firm of Gandolfi.

To the relief of members of the u3a photo group, and no doubt everyone who has a mobile phone, photography today is clearly much simpler than in the past. The Photo group meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 2.0pm. If you like the idea of sharing and talking about pictures you have taken, why not come along? More details on the Soar Valley website. (See back page for link.)



**Chris Bowerman**

## Please Renew Your Subscription on 1st March

Our new financial year begins on 1st March and you'll need to renew your subscription on that date. It's **£12** annually, or £9 if you're an associate member.

There are two ways to pay.

1. (preferred option) By bank transfer to:

**Lloyds Bank Soar Valley U3A Account**  
**Sort Code 30-95-21**  
**Account No. 00080503**

Please send an email to confirm your payment to Membership Secretary, Marilyn Wood: [marilyniwood@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:marilyniwood@yahoo.co.uk)

2. By cheque payable to Soar Valley U3A.

Post/deliver it to Membership Secretary,  
**Marilyn Wood, 6 Salisbury Avenue, East Leake, Loughborough, LE12 6NJ.**

**Please set a payment date of 1<sup>st</sup> March, not before,** to ensure that your payment falls in the correct financial year.

Prompt payment would be appreciated. We're not sending membership cards unless you request one, but you will receive an acknowledgment of payment.

**Important:** *We won't be chasing up late payers by phone and you risk your membership being cancelled if you don't renew your subscription by 30th April latest.*

*(If you joined us recently, you may not need to renew until next year.)*

## Interest in New Groups

The coffee morning exceeded my expectations in terms of attendees. A number of possible new groups were mentioned. If you are interested, please let me know. If there are sufficient numbers, we will try to get them setup:

**Singing group** - a number of people asked about an afternoon singing group to avoid driving in the dark. A member has offered to lead a karaoke daytime group.

Although we have a number of **walking groups**, including the Strollers, it was brought to my attention that there is a gap in what is currently on offer. The Strollers walk up to 1.5 miles, then the next group is 6 miles. Is there sufficient interest for a group that does 3 to 5 mile walks?

Both our **Bird Watching** groups are full but several people were keen to join. Do we need a third Bird Watching group?

*If you're interested in any of these potential groups, or any other new group, please contact me, Ian Lloyd, Groups Coordinator Email: [ian.lloyd1955@gmail.com](mailto:ian.lloyd1955@gmail.com)*

## She Will Never...

Our speaker at the January general meeting has been described as an inspirational woman. Born with defective optic nerves, and a condition known as nystagmus where the eyes move involuntarily, **Amanda Harris** was classed as visually impaired at just a few weeks old. She was told that there were so many things she'd never be able to do: like getting a good education and a good job. But she studied for a law degree, became a department head at Nottingham City Council and set up her own business writing wills.

Her journey through life was told with determination and humour, finding ways to overcome obstacles to do what she wanted.

'People made assumptions about my abilities' she said. But she challenged all of them.

At a school for the blind she met her husband Martin, then partially sighted. But he later became totally blind; yet another obstacle to overcome.

Amanda tells her amazing story in her book: 'She Will Never..' (available from Amazon). She finds reading herself very difficult, but now she's found a way to narrate the book and an audio version is due to launch on 4th March.



**Brian Hinnners**

## A Special Soar Valley Home

Member Stefan Barcikowski, a remarkably skilled DIYer, built his own chalet house on stilts in Barton in Fabis by the side of the Trent river. But the recent floods caused some hairy moments.



It won't have escaped our u3a members that we are named after a delightful river that meanders down through Leicestershire, past Loughborough, finally flowing into the Trent past the power station. What with its ever-changing scenery, waterside chalets and pubs and bankside industrial heritage, it's a firm favourite amongst walkers, boaters and residents.

With the tail end of 2023 being so wet, and flooding so widespread across the valley, you might even have spared a thought as to how folk living alongside cope.

As a twelve-year-old youngster, whilst cycling along these river banks, I would, even back then, question why anyone would aspire to live in bricks and mortar in a three bedroom semi in middle class suburbia when you could reside in one of these romantic riverside shacks with the fauna and flora and ever changing seasons at your nose tip.

Some twenty five years ago, a modest legacy allowed me to fulfil that childhood dream by buying a riverside plot, roughly opposite Attenborough Nature Reserve, and dragging a mobile home onto it, just in time to catch the millennium flood!

Being a modelmaker with architect clients, I set about designing and building a caravan from scratch, because that was all the planning laws allowed me. To withstand the so called 'one in a hundred' flood, it was built on stilts in spitting distance of the river (*top photo*), and I have to say, I've stayed dry ever since.



Spurred on by this achievement, I went on to build a shed that floats (*left*). In 2006 The Daily Telegraph asked readers to send in photos for their 'Shed of the Year' competition and I became a runner up, an achievement I am so proud of: I have left strict instructions for it to be read out in the eulogy at my funeral.

Not one to rest on my laurels, a stab at 'the good life' with chickens was next on the cards, needless to say, housed in a floating ark (*top right*). I let the poor chicks lead a free-range lifestyle most times, unless a flood threatens, when they are

corralled aboard for their own safety. I do feel sorry for them, but the egg yield remains constant once they settle down.

By now, as you can imagine, I was on a roll and, after stopping by the beekeepers stand at the Sutton Bonnington Show,



the bee bug got me, necessitating another floating creation (*left*). The bees don't seem to mind, and the honey flows.

When the floods strike, and lately that's often,

my wife Irena posts photos like these on social media. These tend to trigger well meaning outpourings of pity, sorrow and commiserations for us, coupled with generous offers of shelter and accommodation, though the fact is we have no need of this goodwill!



We have no flood insurance as we have nothing to insure. We pick everything up, stack firewood and bags of coal on the decking, stock up on tea lights, candles, waders, wellies and two stroke petrol for the outboards. We hitch

up the canoes and dinghies then sit back and await the rising water levels. Knowing that the current shack has been built to withstand the millennium 'one in a hundred' flood level, we tend to be a little on the smug side as the waters rise.

However, this past New Year saw that complacency well and truly tested. As the water rose, I made a little video on my phone and sent it off to the BBC, who, to my delight, used it in subsequent news bulletins. It showed the water rising with only four steps to our deck level left. By the next day, there were two. A day later, in the words of the Agatha Christie novel, 'and then there were none'. A narrow escape, they call it.

As the floods receded, we have lately attracted academics, environment agency officials and journalists, researching climate change. They tend to ask us, as living on the front line, an oft repeated question, 'Do you think that there is a marked trend for floods to become more frequent and severe?'

The answer to which is, lamentably always, yes.

**Stefan Barcikowski**

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[Click here](#)

*If you no longer wish to receive this Newsletter or email communications from us, please contact the Membership Secretary.*

The **Annual General Meeting** will be at 2pm on Tuesday 26th March at Normanton on Soar village hall.

Our guest speaker will be member..

**Jim Campbell** with a talk on..

## The Chemistry of Food



Food is essential to our survival, so it's surprising most people know very little about it. Most of the important mood chemical, serotonin, is made by the bacteria in our gut. They are so important that they actually influence our food preferences.

This illustrated talk will discuss why we cook our food, how we make our food choices, how the nutrition affects our health, allowing us to stay well. We will go on to explain the intricate process of making the perfect poached egg on toast, and illustrate the talk with other culinary delights, to provide an entertaining menu suitable for all palates.

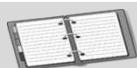
### Agenda

1. Minutes of AGM 31st May 2023
2. Matters arising
3. Chairman's report
4. Election of Management Committee
5. Secretary's report
6. Treasurer's report
  - 6.1 Approval of year end accounts
  - 6.2 Approval of accounts examiner
7. Membership report
8. Groups Coordinator report
9. Social Team report
10. Outings report
11. Any other business
12. Guest speaker

*The following are standing for election to the Committee 2024/5:*

Chris Bowerman, Paul Fileman, Brian Hinners, Ruth Grantham, Gill Howdle, Brian Kirk, Ian Lloyd, Alison Lloyd, Sue Miles, Mike Sharpe, Marilyn Wood

*If you would like to make further nominations before the AGM, please contact Business Secretary, Mike Sharpe, by 7th March. Tel: 01509 853203, Email: msharpe44btinternet.com*



### Diary Dates Reminder

**1st March - Subscription Renewal**

**30th April - Older Drivers Workshop**

**Various outings - see page 3**

**29th November - Christmas party**

We're sad to announce that, since the last Newsletter, the following members and former members have died: Bob Caves, Peter Simpson, Jan Higginson and Margaret Sutton.